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CECIL LAND TRUST

Bill Kilby

To: Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Oversight Hearing: "The Benefits and Challenges of Ecosystem Management through Sustainable Agriculture: Delmarva Peninsula as an Example."

My name is William Kilby. I am co-owner, with my wife Phyllis and our children, of a dairy operation in Cecil County that consists of 470 cows and 450 replacement heifers. We own about 500 acres and rent an additional 500 acres of cropland. As a volunteer, I am president of the Cecil Land Trust, an all-volunteer group dedicated to land and water conservation. I am also legislative chairman of the Cecil County Farm Bureau.

I hate to start out by being philosophical, but when mulling over the title of this hearing, "The Benefits and Challenges of Ecosystem Management through Sustainable Agriculture: Delmarva Peninsula as an Example," I had no choice. 80% of the work I am involved with, in the dairy or as a volunteer, is about attitude. The Delmarva Conservation Corridor Demonstration Program sends the right message to farmers and conservationists. It says by having a positive attitude toward the future of agriculture and, by being willing to invest in that future, agriculture can be sustainable. The message also says agriculture can't be sustainable in a vacuum and that the basis for sustainability is healthy soil and healthy water.

As a dairy farmer, I live in an area that has a long history of farmers cooperating with government agencies. Taxpayer monies that have been invested in soil and water conservation have a history of positive payback for the farmer and the public. Limited tillage, strip cropping, manure storage, crop scouting, cover crops, voluntary nutrient management and stream buffers are practices that have a long history at home and they pay off. Even in the most severe drought years, we have been able to produce enough crops to sustain our operation. In good years we have had extra to sell. Healthy soil absorbs and retains moisture.

As president of the Cecil Land Trust, I see healthy water as a common bond between farmers and our non-farming neighbors. Healthy water is a way of gauging our attitude toward the world outside of our farming operations. The Corridor Program helps us all understand the interdependence of our attitude and actions on our ecosystem.

On a more objective basis, the Corridor Program has the opportunity to help us evolve in the production and marketing of our agricultural products. Because the program promotes planning and investing in the future of Delmarva's agriculture base, we are willing to take greater risk. The Chesapeake Fields Institute being an example. As members of the Institute we have been offered the opportunity to play a larger role in determining our own future in agriculture. The development and marketing of agricultural products is a new reality to most of us and not without risk. The fact that the federal government views the Delmarva as a unique place to demonstrate the bottom ups approach to sustainable agriculture through market development helps lessen that risk.

As a Cecil Land Trust volunteer, I am encouraged by the Corridor Program's emphasis on integrating agricultural conservation and the acquisition of easements and development rights. Cecil County is one of the fastest growing counties on the Delmarva. We are located on the I-95 corridor midway between Philadelphia and Baltimore. The need to retain our land base, our agricultural infrastructure, is a paramount concern. The Corridor Program will help us stretch our local and state agricultural land preservation funds to protect more of our agricultural infrastructure.

The challenge I see for the Corridor Program is bringing the concept down to the local level. Fortunately, on the Upper Shore we have had the opportunity to take part in a unique program at Washington College that promotes the concept of land preservation through ag economic development or preservation through profitability. That emphasizes the importance of our agricultural communities as part of the larger Delmarva

ecosystem. That is educating a diverse group of community leaders in taking a broader view of their actions and how these actions can affect the Delmarva.

In closing, I find the Delmarva Conservation Corridor Demonstration Program an opportunity to bring together the proven ideas that can make agriculture, land and water conservation and community building truly sustainable.